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The Claims of Higher Education on our Christian Youth.

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AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the Presbyterian Rally of the Christian Endeavor Convention,

Boston, July 11, 1895.

—BY—

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EASTON, PA.:
LAFAYETTE PRESS.
1895.

Reprinted from *The New York Observer*.

LC 583
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The College



The Claims of Higher Education on our Christian Youth.

THERE was a time when higher education was the privilege of the few. Not merely in that far distant day when class distinctions, or the claims of the church, alone opened the door of learned institutions, but in a time far nearer to us in fact or in spiritual sympathies. In the youth of our own fathers, even it was not every son of the rich and cultivated who was given the opportunity for colleges training, far less the children of the less wealthy or less cultivated. In the homes of the better to-do citizens of the cities one son who looked forward to a profession might naturally enough go to college; in the homes of struggling, God-fearing, brave-hearted men and women the ablest or best beloved of many would be sent to college and kept there by the self-sacrificing labor, not merely of father and mother, but of sisters and brothers as well. Higher education was a prize for one out of many. Even to enter the contest unusual promise was necessary. To win the goal, perseverance, devotion and long continued struggle with poverty were inevitable. The boy from the country

town who was away at college, was followed by the anxious solicitude and generous pride, not merely of his own household, but of the entire community, and honors conferred on him were regarded as civic crowns for all his fellow townsmen. All who have read that delightful little volume of Scottish stories, "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush," will recall the beautiful opening sketch of Domsie, the village schoolmaster, and his favorite pupil. Its story is the story of many another town, and many another master and pupil. Would to God that such devotion to a high and noble life were more universal!

But to-day the doors of school and college and university are open wide. No boy or girl who desires a higher education need fail to obtain it. The path that was once narrow and stony is now broad and smooth. A thousand aids are open to all, a thousand voices are begging our youth to come and take the rich feast that has been prepared by the loving generosity of christian founders, a thousand rich rewards in prizes, fellowships, honorable callings, glorious opportunities for service await the successful seekers after knowledge. Let us not refuse to see the truth. The opportunities for higher training have increased a thousand-fold and the number who avail themselves of them has increased in due proportion. Not only so; the standards of college life have improved, the beauty and nobility of youthful enthusi-

asm for God and his truth have come to be more highly esteemed, and the pursuit of truth and the lives of the seekers have been made more consonant. We have lost some of the old sense of the rarity and preciousness of the opportunity, but we have gained in the zeal with which the opportunity is seized on. There is less glorification of a college education, and a far greater realization of the importance of making a college education but a stepping stone to usefulness. You hear much more to-day of college athletics than of college studies; of college pranks than of college prayer-meetings; but go inside of any of our century-old colleges and compare the life to-day with that of long ago, and the universal testimony will be that there is more study and more devotion to duty to-day than ever before; that where once it was common to break up college prayer-meetings by college pranks, now college prayer-meetings have banished all the more common and brutal college pranks to the limbo of the well-forgotten. The vital christian life of our youth bred in constant christian activity is now the controlling factor in college life. College life is less and less a thing apart, and more and more a preparatory training for a larger life beyond—a preparatory training which is thoroughly understood to carry in itself the moulding influences of the future, and to condition the usefulness of the future by its own character. No longer does a young man imagine that he can sow wild oats in

college, and reap good grain in after years. A greater publicity rules the college life. It is true that athletics and pranks occupy the larger space in the secular press, but it is also true that the athletics are largely influenced by the christian students, and the pranks frowned on by them, and that Northfield conferences and Christian Endeavor conventions are attended by far more Christian college men than are to be found in any other than praiseworthy affairs.

The christian college is, then, quite as much the gathering place of our christian youth as ever. But besides this it should have a strong personal attraction for every young christian. Every christian college has written over its door the word "Opportunity." Your opportunity, young christian, whether you are boy or girl. God has given you a life to live. What shall it be? Youth has bright dreams and fair ideals. Youth longs for one thing, Opportunity. Youth cannot afford to sit still like Mr. Micawber, and wait for "something to turn up." Opportunity must often be sought, must even be made, but here it lies right athwart your path. There are many kinds of opportunity; the only kind I would speak of at this time, indeed, the only opportunity worth speaking of at all, is the opportunity for christian service. Every generation has its own shibboleths. It matters little how we phrase the truth, so we are sure the substance is the same. Duty, love, God and His

glory! All these words may mean the same to us. The great thing is to fully comprehend the great all-embracing fact, that christian service is needed to give expression to christian faith, and that christian service means the fulfilment of our duty to self, fellow men and God. So wide is this horizon, so far-reaching the activity that will be needed to fill its compass, that nothing short of the highest training will suffice for its accomplishment. God has already pointed out that our first duty is to self. Here is one of the points upon which superficial thinkers constantly go astray. No man can help others till he has fitted himself to be helpful. No man can help save others till he has found Christ. No man can teach till he has learned how to teach through being taught himself. The great curse of our times is the tendency of men half-prepared for life's duties to rush into the largest fields of labor. Immature, half-equipped, ignorant of their own ignorance, vainly assuming undertakings of the loftiest character, they become the sport of every passing wind of opinion and drag down others with them. A man's first duty to himself is to prepare himself, not quickly, but thoroughly. The question is not how soon he gets to work, but how good the work he does when he gets to work.

Each man's first duty is to prepare himself thoroughly—for what? Here again the question is of self, and yet now with a distinct look ahead to fellow men and up to

God. With only self before us we can unhesitatingly say—for the highest attainable work. When we come to ask, What is highest?—looking beyond self we judge not for self, but for the service of men and the glory of God. When we come again to ask, What is the highest attainable? we must judge with all humility, and yet—counting God our helper—without cowardice. Such preparation for such high ends demands time and patience. God sent His prophets to the wilderness—what a waste of time and force, some of our too eager youth will say—yet they learned deeper lessons of God in the desert fastnesses than were taught in the schools of human philosophy. Yet others God set in schools of human thought; Moses in the schools of Egypt, Saul in the school of the Rabbins. The Lord himself did not begin His ministry till He was about thirty years of age. A matured mind in a fully developed body is essential to the best results, and these are what our colleges aim to give.

The American college of to-day is not a fortuitous aggregation of educational influences, but a combination of the carefully chosen and well tested means and methods of making not merely scholars, but men. Under healthful conditions of growth the best ideas of all countries have been tried and so far as they have proved satisfactory adopted. The result is a place of highly organized teaching in which, with a generally strong current of advice and direction, young men are free to choose

courses and studies which will fit them for any kind of usefulness. There is no limit to the inclusiveness of the college. Side by side, as in the town or city, young men fit themselves for the learned professions, the technical pursuits, for business, farming, or any other vocation. They are taught first, and before all else, that training is necessary. The man, his mind, his moral nature, must be developed before he can be useful. The man cannot become a specialist before his moral nature is taught the necessity of labor, that earnest, devoted, laborious, fatiguing, exhausting work, alone wins mastery; nor without first conquering the mental vices of assumption, prejudice, insufficient generalization, etc., by carefully chosen exercises in mental gymnastics. The higher teaching of the class room is constantly supplemented, moreover, by the often hard, but valuable, training of college life, with its struggles and temptations, its high pressure democracy, its keen criticism, pitiless ridicule, hatred of sham and rousing enthusiasm for what it believes in; the ball field and the debating society, the Christian Association and the secret fraternity, prove the metal of which manhood is being made, brightening the true, and finding the flaws in the poor material.

The courses in college have been formulated under the advice of the most successful men in the various careers; college life has grown up among earnest, vig-

orous young people under the direction of teachers who were students of life and character as well as books. Is it not natural that in each sphere of future usefulness the road that leads through college will be the shortest, the smoothest and the best?

If we press the duty of highest usefulness one step farther we may well claim that every young christian owes no small obligation to his fellow men and to his Lord, not merely to prepare himself for some useful work thoroughly, but also to choose the very highest possible work. I cannot take the time that would be needed to discuss the proposition, but I do not hesitate to claim for the ministry the highest right in every young christian's thought. Then comes the healing art with its noble opportunities, the cause of justice wherein the christian virtues must ever shine, teaching in all its varieties, and the other callings in due order, all low or high according to the powers expended on them, and the purpose in them, whether only selfish seeking after wealth or ease or influence, or the glory of God. If the claims of the ministry are not heeded, if no call to it is heard, and some other calling is adopted, it must still be remembered that there is room for christian service in every life, and that youth is the time for preparation for such service. It will be made richer and fuller by higher training in the languages and histories of mankind in their sciences and philosophy, in all that has

been thought and done since God set man in the midst of his creation. Such equipment is to be had best through the college,—for some of the highest callings only through the college,—and such equipment is necessary not merely for the professional man and the scholar, but in this day a thorough education is so free that it is the ordinary portion of every earnest worker and thinker. It becomes, therefore, the especial duty of the christian man to know as much as may be known of God's providence in His dealing with man in history and nature. Out of such a training flow a larger human sympathy, a deeper knowledge of the needs of men and how to meet them, and above all, a fuller comprehension of God's ways among men. Thus is bred the large and comprehending mind, the fervid and hopeful heart, the intelligent and earnest deed, and man comes more and more to strive to improve every gift of God that he may use every faculty for the service of man and the glory of God.

ETHELBERT D. WARFIELD.

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

AT EASTON, PENNA.

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